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AUTHOR Harris, Zelema
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ABSTRACT

In 1987, one-third of the kindergarten students in the United States were minority. These students will be the pool from which institutions of higher education will draw their college freshmen in the year 2000. The impact of this increase in cultural and ethnic diversity will be pervasive, especially with respect to broadening European-oriented curricula to make them more inclusive of other cultures. The changes that the colleges will face must be approached systematically. Institutional commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity from the executive level must be in place before progress can be achieved. This commitment must be reflected in recruitment and retention efforts to increase the number of minority and female faculty members, in activities to educate faculty members who are insensitive to minorities and non-traditional students, and in efforts to involve minority faculty members in guiding institutional responses to diversity. Student recruitment and retention efforts must focus on reversing the trend toward declining rates of participation of minority students in higher education; identifying barriers to transfer and academic success; and developing academic and personal support systems to ensure achievement. Black colleges, which provide many role models for students, promote high expectations, and foster student/teacher interaction, have played an important role in educating black youth, awarding an estimated 40% of all of the degrees earned by black students. The predominantly white colleges that have been successful in graduating minority students share the views that minority achievement is a preparation issue rather than a racial issue, that the campus environment is critical, and that the underrepresentation of minorities within the faculty needs attention. All colleges prepare themselves for the future if they begin to embrace the changing student population now. (AJL)

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Institutional Commitment to Cultural Diversity

Dr. Zelena Harris
President
Penn Valley Community College

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois
March 8, 1988

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Dr. Zelema Harris
President
Penn Valley Community College
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
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Institutional Commitment to Cultural Diversity

I plan to leave you with three messages this morning:

(1) Heighten your awareness of our future so that you seek answers to: What will be the culture and ethnicity of our students by the year 2000; Who will our students be; What skills will they possess; and What needed experiental and cognitive skills will be absent?

(2) Encourage you to begin the process of institutional reformation so that your curricula, support programs, and faculty mix can respond to the newly emerging students.

(3) Stress the importance of total institutional commitment, beginning with the chief executive officer of the institution, for cultural and ethnic diversity to become a reality.

TO HEIGHTEN AWARENESS OF OUR FUTURE: TO THINK FUTURE

Whether we like it or not, the coloring of our institutions will be a reality by the year 2000. Some of our institutions are already colored, and by the year 2000 many institutions will be predominately students of color. We know this to be true because the wonderful thing about demographics, unlike any other area of social science, is that it tells us with a high degree of accuracy who our citizens will be in the future if we know who the young are today. We now know the sex, socioeconomic level, race and ethnic mix of our kindergarteners. And, unless something catastrophic happens, this will be the pool from which we will draw our college freshmen in the year 2000. Kindergarten students in 1987 were one-third minority, according to Harold Hodgkinson.[1] In Texas and California there was a minority majority in the five-year-old population. This increase in the percentage of minority students is due to a decline in the birth rates of white females, and is not due to a major increase in minority birth rates.[2] As a matter of fact, some social scientists have proposed that white females of European stock be encouraged to have more children to counteract the alarming and continuous increase of minorities in the U.S. and other free countries.

In his recently published book, The Birth Dearth, Ben J. Wattenburg, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote that for about a decade and a half the people of the free, modern industrial world, including the U.S., have not borne enough children to reproduce themselves over an extended period of time.[3] This doomsday prediction for white European stock reminds me of a poem written by a progressive faculty member at Penn Valley which goes like this: "We stand on the brink of another man. / All around the world the land is changing hands. / I really don't care if you believe me. Just ask Nicaragua or Mozambique."[4]

We have already begun to see the coloring of our campuses. Certainly, the entire Southwestern part of the U.S. has already been affected, namely, Texas, Florida, and California. I recently read in the Chronicle of Higher Education that for the first time, Berkley's fall, 1987 freshman class had a majority of minority students --12 percent

black, 17 percent Hispanic, 26 percent Asian, and 40 percent white.[5] The impact of cultural and ethnic diversity will be pervasive, especially upon our curriculum.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

I want to stress that we need to approach the changes our institutions will face in a systematic way. I am reminded of the student revolts of the 60s and early 70s. Our institutions were not prepared to address student uprisings. We should have known something about those students who were on our campuses and their values which embraced idealism. They actually believed in a society, free of racism, sexism, and classism. Many of them viewed the civil rights movement as something that spoke to their idealism. These young people also had numbers to support their values, and their values prevailed.

Today, those of us who lived through and participated in the student movement are more aware. We don't have to be caught off guard. We can study the demographics of our future students and predict what we have to do as an institution to modify a European-oriented curricula so that it can become more inclusive of other cultures. We will all be the richer for it. I believe the impact of the civil rights movement on our curricula generated new research opportunities for faculty, infused new ideologies, and created excitement in the classroom. We need to ensure that our curricula, students, support staff, administration, and our faculty reflect the diversity and richness of our community, our state, and our country.

In reviewing where we are, and where we need to go as an institution, I find myself reflecting on a chapter from Alvin Toffler's 1970 book Future Shock, "Education in the Future Tense," wherein he advances the notion that we do not, as educators, teach the future. And, hence our young people are not prepared to deal with the future.[6] I believe that futurists are an elite group. However, unless their visions are popularized and included in our curricula, we will continue to be shocked by changes, rendering us immobile to act. Toffler's chapter on the future of education is so appropriate today. He suggests that children be taught to speculate early in childhood in classes that address the future.[7] Some of you may remember speculating as youth about going to the moon and

sharing that with someone whom you respected and being derided with statements such as, "You know you're not going to the moon."

I remember a common saying in my small rural community in response to someone doing something totally inappropriate. The saying went: "She had no more business doing that than a man on the moon." Remember that? Toffler goes on to say that science fiction is held in low esteem as a branch of literature, and suggests that perhaps it could be used as sociology of the future.[8] As educators we need to plan for our future with as much precision as possible in order to meet the diverse needs of our students, many of whom will have language barriers, a dearth of middle-class values, and few of the traditional academic skills we hold in reverence. Remember, reform in education takes a long time. Our future college students from the traditional age cohort will be those who are now in first grade. Will our current mission address this population of potential students or will it be necessary to reallocate resources?

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

Institutional commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity from the top executive level must be in place before anything is accomplished. There must be involvement across the board, and the initiative must come from the president or chancellor, or better yet, the board. In the planning process, attention must be given to addressing the dearth of minority representation.

Goals must be established. The selection committees must be given the authority to increase the participation of underrepresented groups. These goals must be disseminated throughout the college. You can't soft-pedal this issue and use conditional statements like "Institution X plans to increase the number of minority and female faculty members within the context of our initiatives on faculty excellence," or make any statement that suggests that equality and quality are mutually exclusive. Recruitment and retention committees for minority students must be composed of tenured faculty who are supportive of equal opportunity and affirmative action goals as well as those faculty who may be known to demonstrate insensitivities toward minorities or non-traditional students. As an educator, I believe all people have the potential for change or I would not

be in the business of providing opportunities for change through instruction, support services, and a rich academic and social environment. In my own institution, a two year urban college with an enrollment of approximately 6,000 students, 55.3 percent of the students are white and 44.7 percent are minority. Black students represent 34.5 percent of the 44.7 percent minority students. Females represent 60 percent of the total student population. White females represent 31 percent of all students; black females represent 25 percent of the student population; and Hispanic females represent about 2 percent of the students. On the other hand, our full-time faculty is 71 percent white, and 29 percent minority. Blacks represent 26 percent of our full-time faculty. Our part-time faculty is 86 percent white and 14 percent minority. Blacks represent 13 percent of our part-time faculty. Females represent 50 percent of full-time faculty, 53 percent of part-time, and 52 percent of total faculty. I have a commitment to increase minority faculty and to ensure the success of minority students. I have forwarded articles dealing with the decline of minority students, the underrepresentation of minority faculty and the devastating decline in black male participation in higher education, to the extent that he is considered an endangered species. Faculty have responded to these articles and offered ways in which Penn Valley can reverse this trend.

I believe many of my minority peers do not use their expertise to help our institutions to respond to diversity. Minorities and women have a very special place in the future of higher education. Our experience can aid institutions of higher education to address the needs of future students. We can serve as valuable resources --experts in residence. Institutions need us now and will have an even greater need for us in the future.

We should feel good about who we are and what we can offer along with those traditional skills we possess.

We should also begin to address an alarming trend—the drop in the number of minority students in higher education. This drop is perplexing because according to a September 2 article in the Chronicle, between 1976 and 1985, the high-school graduation rate of black students rose from 67 to 75 percent, while the college-going rate of those students

dropped from 34 to 26 percent. For Hispanics, high-school graduation rates increased from 56 to 62 percent, while the college-going rate fell from 36 to 26 percent.[9] In addition to including all segments of the college in efforts to increase the participation of minorities, it is imperative that we begin to develop a body of knowledge about underrepresented groups. What are the demographics? What are the values, and what support services are needed?

In other words, identify the barriers to their success and develop or reorganize systems to address their needs. Academic and personal support systems must be in place if students are to achieve. I referred in my abstract to historically black schools and the major role they have played in educating black youth.

As cited in a 1987 Change article, black colleges awarded approximately 34 percent of all undergraduate degrees earned by black students.[10] The Change article was based on 1981 data. Since that time, current reports cite that 40 percent of blacks receive their degrees from black colleges.[11]

There are obvious reasons why black colleges do such a good job of educating black students: there are many role models for students; teachers have high expectations and a caring attitude; and there is interaction between students and teachers which is an important element in learning and one that black students find missing with their white instructors. Most importantly, institutional racism, whether real or perceived, is not a barrier in black institutions.

But there are some predominately white institutions that have been successful in graduating minority students. The Change article identified 10 schools as successful in graduating minorities. Included were Temple University; the University of Texas, El Paso; the University of New Mexico; Memphis State; Florida State; California State at Dominguez Hills; Brooklyn College; Wayne State; Florida International University; and UCLA.[12]

The article by Richard Richardson, Howard Simmons, and Alfreda de los Santos, Jr. reported several practices that seemed evident in those 10 colleges.

(1) Minority achievement is viewed as a preparation problem rather than a racial problem. Most of these universities develop their minority applicant pool through early outreach efforts in the junior high school and provide some type of summer academic support program for minority youth. Leadership in these institutions recognize that deficiencies cannot be made up after students martriculate. Penn Valley Community College has implemented a program for high school juniors and seniors that enables them to take college level courses on our campus. Support services are available and a systematic interaction between the college and student is planned. There are approximately 300 students in the program. Remedial course work is provided to those students who have deficiencies.

(2) The campus environment is recognized as a critical factor in student involvement and success—supporting students through black student unions, and cultural events is important to success.

(3) Small numbers of minority faculty members and limited involvement in equal opportunity strategies by all faculty members are recognized as problems needing attention by these universities. They identify the problem of underrepresentation of minority faculty and begin to develop their own pool. Many offer graduate fellowships to minorities and have a strong affirmative action recruitment program.

(4) There is visible evidence of administrative commitment—often that means providing financial support.

(5) Strategies to promote the success of minority students were comprehensive and systematic rather than fragmented and sporadic.

There was a comprehensive plan in place to address underrepresentation. They identified student needs, and developed support programs for them, such as tutoring, summer bridge programs, and faculty advising.

(6) The most progress has occurred among universities where institutional commitment and good educational practices are enhanced by a favorable state policy environment.[13]

National policy has always influenced what has happened to minorities, and particularly blacks, in this country. The fact that there is no national policy to assist educators in addressing minority group needs is a national disgrace. But what can we expect from a secretary of education who refused to submit goals and timetables to EEOC when he headed the National Endowment for the Humanities.

I believe however, there is a national concern about the coloring of America. Those of the majority race recognize the impact this group may have on the quality of their lives. They know the least prepared will enter our college doors in large numbers by the year 2000. These students will bring a different culture to the college, and we can decide whether their presence will be a shock, or whether we will be prepared with the right support programs in place, a curricula that is not entirely European, but inclusive of other cultures and ethnicities, a multi-cultural faculty, an administration that is committed to multi-cultural education, and an overall qualitative environment that expects and supports excellence.

We can be prepared. We have the time and the resources to be prepared. I'm excited about our future. Our college campuses will be stimulating places with a mix of dress, values, and international and global approaches to education. We will all be linked universally for the first time in our history. This will be a new day in our colleges and universities. We can decide whether to embrace the change or attempt to protect vestiges of an educational system that no longer meets society's needs.

# # #

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